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URBAN FIRE EDUCATION: SEATTLE CASE STUDY

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ARREST ARSON: KEEP YOUR MATCHBOOKS CLOSED.

URBAN FIRE EDUCATION: SEATTLE CASE STUDY

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THE OFFICE OF PLANNING AND EDUCATION,
UNITED STATES FIRE ADMINISTRATION,
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

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DISCLAIMER

This report was prepared under a grant from the United States Fire Administration and reflects the views of the participants in the event reported. The contents of this report do not necessarily represent the views of the United States Fire Administration.

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Mary Saily

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INTRODUCTION

A major goal of the Office of Planning and Education (OPE), U.S. Fire Administration, is to identify effective local fire education programs and strategies, and distribute information about them nationwide. Other fire personnel can then choose to apply or adapt the programs and strategies to their own localities and needs.

This case study is part of OPE's information sharing effort. Specifically, the study describes the fire education programs of the Seattle Fire Department. This department's comprehensive approach to fire education focuses on arson prevention and control as well as on general fire safety. It includes four major elements:

- Code Red, a program that promptly delivers a fire safety message to residents in a neighborhood that has recently experienced a fire;
- Fire Prevention Programs, special presentations designed to meet the needs of particular businesses and groups of citizens;
- School and Fire Safe Education, a program that reaches all 37,000 elementary school children in Seattle each year; and
- Arson Prevention Activities, a variety of public education and awareness efforts that have contributed to a 44 percent reduction in arson in Seattle since 1974.

Many of the materials used in these four program areas are available to other fire personnel at cost; names and addresses of contact people within the Seattle Fire Department are included as appropriate.

Information about the programs and strategies covered in this study was collected in December 1979. The author conducted interviews with the following individuals in the Seattle Fire Department: Frank R. Hanson, Department Chief; Inspector Jim Sherman, head of the Public Education office; Penelope Canada and Linda Schulz, fire prevention specialists within Public Education; and Jack Hickam, senior arson investigator. (In early 1980, just after these interviews were conducted, Chief Hanson retired from his post.)

The interviews provided the bulk of the information included in this publication. In addition, the author observed these individuals in action and was given Fire Department documents and brochures to review.

CODE RED DELIVERS FIRE SAFETY MESSAGES TO SEATTLE RESIDENTS

People are never more conscious of fire safety than immediately after a fire occurs in their neighborhood. The Seattle Fire Department takes advantage of this natural increase in public consciousness through a program called "Code Red," named for the Department's radio code signifying a fire.

Code Red is based on a simple notion: immediate contact with residents in a neighborhood that has just experienced a fire is a good strategy for promoting fire safety.

"Within 24 hours after the fire engines move out, Code Red moves in," explains Chief Frank R. Hanson. "Firefighters and civilian fire prevention specialists promote and conduct a meeting in a home in the neighborhood. They explain the causes of the fire and present a fire prevention program. After three years of experience with Code Red, we believe it is both an effective and a cost-effective approach to public fire education."

An alternative to residential inspections

Code Red was initiated as an alternative to a residential inspection program staffed by 18 civilian CETA employees trained in home inspection techniques. Three squads of six inspectors each canvassed Seattle neighborhoods by census track to inspect homes for fire hazards.

These inspectors found that they were able to gain access to only about 25 percent of the homes in any given area. "Based on their reports of the few hazards they found, we suspected they were being admitted primarily to the better kept, lower loss residences," explains Chief Hanson.

A study of the labor-intensive home inspection program verified this assumption. Fire Department records showed that homes being inspected indeed had lower fire rates and losses prior to inspection than homes to which inspectors were unable to gain access. Nevertheless, the study revealed that both fire rates and losses were further reduced in the inspected homes after the inspection visits. This reduction was quite costly, however. The total residential inspection program cost the Fire Department about $450,000 a year. And the cost per inspection was about $28, while the average savings (reduced fire loss) was only about $5.

"The study led us to conclude that the program was effective, but not cost effective," says Chief Hanson. "So we looked for an alternative—one that would be less costly and would reach citizens in the previously inaccessible homes. That's how we hit on Code Red."

The Code Red program is operated by the Public Education Office in cooperation with the rest of the Seattle Fire Department; Public Education reports to the Fire Marshal's Office. In December 1979, two civilian fire prevention specialists were responsible for carrying out Code Red with direction from Inspector Jim Sherman, head of Public Education. These civilian specialists, then funded through CETA, were prepared for their responsibilities through

an intensive six-week training program. They are equipped to schedule, coordinate, and publicize Code Red meetings and to present fire safety information at the meetings. They also carry the fire safety message to businesses and citizen groups as described in this case study.

A Code Red meeting—planning and organization

It is obviously not possible, or even desirable, to hold a Code Red meeting in response to every residential fire in Seattle. Each day, therefore, the fire prevention specialists screen fires to determine which, if any, are appropriate candidates for the Code Red program. According to Linda Schulz, one of the specialists, she and her co-worker, Penelope Canada, go over a "morning report" that is distributed to key Department personnel each day. The report lists each fire that has occurred in the past 24 hours and gives the time of the fire, address, dollar loss, injuries, and cause.

"We look for fires that have caused extensive damage or fires related to seasonal problems, such as heating units too close to draperies," explains Schulz. "We especially watch for 'people caused' fires; those fires that individuals could have prevented if they had been more fire safety conscious."

Once a fire has been identified as being appropriate for Code Red, a chain of events is set in motion. The result is a neighborhood meeting within 24 hours.

The first step in setting up the meeting is locating a resident who is willing to host a group of neighbors. The fire prevention specialists approach the homes in close proximity to the house involved in the fire. If possible, they start with the house next door. The resident is told about the Code Red program and its importance to the community, and is asked to host the meeting. The only criteria, in addition to proximity, is that the host home have adequate space for a meeting of 15-30 people.

"Most people are willing to open up their homes to their neighbors," Linda Schulz reports. "We don't have trouble convincing them. And when the fire is in an apartment building, the manager is usually willing to help out."

After the host home is obtained, the fire prevention specialists invite the neighbors to the meeting. They canvass homes within a one- or two-block radius, where people are likely to know of the fire. A written invitation explains Code Red and lists the time and location of the meeting. The specialists hand the invitation to residents along with a verbal explanation, or simply leave it at the door if no one is home.

Participation of fire personnel

Preparing for a Code Red meeting also entails coordinating the participation of appropriate Fire Department personnel. A moderator is identified to run the meeting. This individual is a fire officer, generally a lieutenant from the engine company that responded to the alarm. More than 30 fire officers have been trained to serve as Code Red

Linda Schulz is a fire prevention specialist involved in the Code Red program.

moderators. The moderator, as well as engine company members, are requested to participate in the meeting through a memo sent from the Fire Marshal's Office.

The moderator is responsible for keeping the meeting moving along on course. He directs the program to ensure a good exchange between the audience and the engine company members, who tell the story of the fire. The moderator draws the details out of firefighters sometimes reluctant to describe their own actions, and responds to questions that deal with overall Fire Department practices or policies. The engine company members remain on call through the meeting and the moderator completes the presentation if they receive an alarm.

In addition to the moderator and engine company, other appropriate fire department personnel sometimes are invited to participate. For example, if arson is suspected, an arson investigator attends.

"As a rule, we don't schedule Code Red meetings in response to arson fires," says Penelope Canada, "because we want to avoid interfering with the investigation. However, if there's some good reason to go ahead with a meeting, the arson investigator is asked to participate. He is better able to field questions regarding the suspected arson without revealing sensitive information."

The Code Red meeting is normally conducted during the early evening, after the dinner hour. The moderator and fire prevention specialist arrive early to set up audiovisual equipment and assist the host in preparing for guests. The engine company also arrives in advance and parks in front of the house. The engine serves as a landmark and reminds people that the meeting is about to begin.

Elements of a Code Red meeting

The moderator opens the meeting by introducing himself, thanking people for coming, and explaining the purpose of Code Red. He then introduces the engine company members who describe the recent fire—what caused it, how it spread, and how they put it out. They answer questions on firefighting strategies, such as, "Why did you chop a hole in the roof?" The moderator guides the discussion and addresses questions that are beyond the expertise or authority of the engine company members.

After a thorough discussion of the fire, the fire prevention specialist takes the floor. She presents slides that illustrate common fire hazards in the home, briefly describes each hazard, and suggests appropriate corrective measures. She answers questions as she goes along and invites comments by the firefighters. They often provide specific examples of damage caused by failure to take adequate fire prevention measures.

Next, the fire prevention specialist shows a film called "EDITH"—short for "Exit Drills In The Home." The film details how to plan and carry out a home evacuation. Following the film, the specialist demonstrates the use of smoke detectors and shows samples of the different types (but doesn't advocate any particular brand). She describes appropriate placement of the smoke detectors and discusses how to keep them in good working order.

According to Schulz, two other facts always are emphasized by the specialists. "We explain the use of the 911 emergency phone number," she says. "And we encourage community members to call the Fire Department when they've had a fire incident they think they've remedied on their own. "We stress that our services are free. We've found that many residents, especially immigrants, operate under the mistaken notion that they have to pay a fee if they call on us."

A question-and-answer session concludes the 45-minute Code Red program. And when it's possible, the group visits the site of the fire to see first-hand where it started and how it progressed. Of course, permission to tour the building must first be obtained from the owner or occupant.

A specific example

On December 3, 1979, a Code Red program was conducted in a trailer park on the north side of Seattle. Florence Kier, a 73-year-old resident of the park, had died in a fire in her trailer from smoke inhalation and third-degree burns. The cause of the fire: smoking in bed.

The meeting was held in the trailer park's recreation center. Approximately 75 people attended. Lieutenant Marlin Smith from Engine Company 31 served as moderator; he and other firefighters from the company recounted their experience with the fire.

"They explained that they responded to a police radio call for help," Schulz reports. "The call came about half an hour after the fire had started, judging from the extensive damage. The occupant was found at the foot of the bed where it appeared she had been overcome by smoke and gases. The bed was completely consumed and the floor under it was deeply charred."

Following the discussion of the fire, Schulz presented her fire safety program, and residents asked many questions about fire hazards. And when she described fires caused by electric blankets, one woman exclaimed, "Oh, I left my electric blanket on!" and beat a hasty retreat out the door. "This type of reaction has occurred before, and the resident is usually back at the meeting within a few minutes," notes Schulz.

Battalion Chief C.P. Moody attended this Code Red meeting. He reinforced Schulz's presentation on smoke detectors, took part in the question-and-answer session, and stayed for a tea following the meeting to talk informally with the residents. The local batallion chief does not usually participate in Code Red meetings. But when fire damage is extensive or a life has been lost, public interest is particularly high and such an authority figure lends added weight to the program.

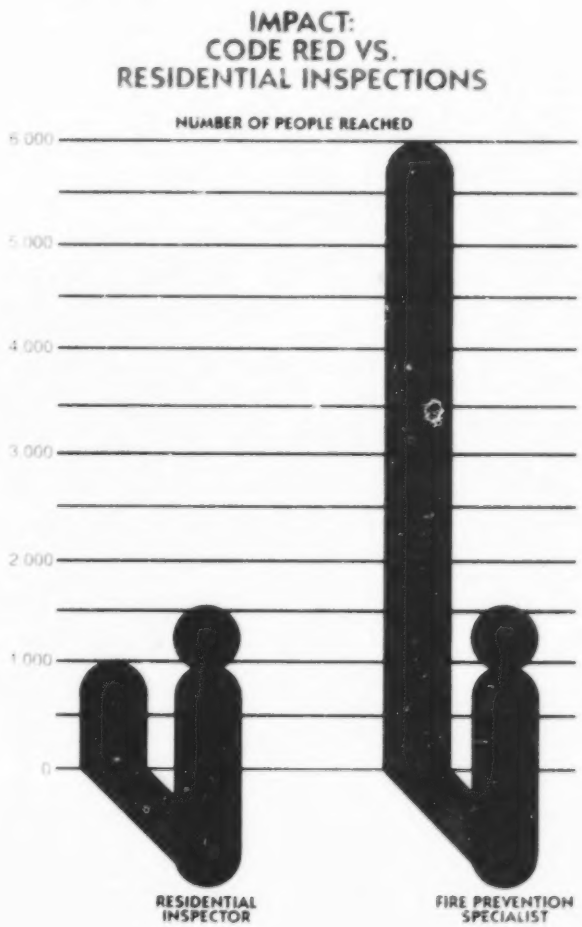
This Code Red meeting, like many others, generated interest in fire safety that lasted beyond the time of the meeting. During the next few weeks several trailer park residents asked the Fire Department to conduct inspections of their homes. This service is always promoted at Code Red meetings.

Impact of Code Red

The Seattle Fire Department has not systematically evaluated the impact of Code Red on fire loss in the city. That is, there has been no formal assessment to determine whether individuals attending Code Red meetings subsequently have fewer fires than those not involved.

The Department does know, though, that Code Red is reaching more citizens on a per-work-hour basis than the previous residential inspection program: each residential inspector gained access to approximately 500 homes per year, or an estimated maximum of 1,000 adults; each fire prevention specialist, in contrast, reaches more than 6,000 citizens per year with a fire safety message, either through Code Red or related programs. (Other programs conducted by these specialists are featured in the next section of this case study.)

The residential inspectors, as mentioned earlier, gained access to only about 25 percent of the homes in any given area. Also, they failed to gain admittance to those homes with higher initial fire rates and losses. The Code Red program, on the other hand, undoubtedly is reaching into these homes. It hits people who have a special interest in fire safety at that moment. It brings the program into their neighborhood in the evening, when most residents can attend. And it does not require people to open their homes for inspection by authorities. The Code Red strategy enables the Fire Department to bring a fire prevention message to a larger and more diversified audience.



This capability has sold the Seattle Fire Department on the merits of Code Red. The administration's commitment to the program is reflected in a plan to employ additional fire prevention specialists in the coming year. Also the current specialists are employed through the federally funded Comprehensive Employment and Training Act. When CETA funds run out later this year, the Department plans to allocate the necessary resources to add these positions, as well as one or two new positions, to its payroll.

For more information about Code Red, contact Linda Schulz or Penelope Canada, Publication Education, Seattle Fire Department, 301 Second Avenue South, Seattle, Washington 98104; (206) 625-4071.

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FIRE PREVENTION PROGRAMS MEET SPECIAL NEEDS OF CITIZENS AND BUSINESSES

Target your message to fit the needs of your audience: that's the first rule of communicating effectively. And it's a rule that's carefully observed by the Seattle Fire Department's Public Education Office. The office, under the direction of Inspector Jim Sherman, conducts programs to meet the special fire safety needs of particular segments of the Seattle community. He and his staff have prepared and given presentations to these categories of individuals and businesses:

- Asian Immigrants
- Babysitters
- Banks
- Boys' Clubs and Girls' Clubs
- Church Groups
- College Dormitories
- Community Groups
- Department Stores
- Fraternities and Sororities
- Handicapped Individuals
- High School Students
- High-Rise Apartment Dwellers
- Hospitals
- Industries
- Pre-school Children
- Restaurants
- Senior Citizens

In addition, Jim Sherman runs a special program that reaches all elementary school children in Seattle each year. The effort is described later in this case study.

Common and unique elements of presentations

Each presentation to businesses or special groups includes most of these elements: slides of common fire hazards; a film on home evacuation; a smoke detector demonstration; a discussion of how to use the 911 emergency telephone number; a description of Fire Department services; and a question-and-answer session.

The content of each presentation and the audiovisuals used vary according to the needs, concerns, age, and particular circumstances of the audience. To communicate with the deaf and hearing-impaired, for example, the fire prevention specialists use an interpreter. In addition, Sherman reports that he and his staff are working with the "theater for the deaf" unit of the Drama Department at the Seattle Community College. They are working on a pantomine for use in informing the hearing-impaired of the importance of fire safety. Sherman hopes to film the pantomine.

Programs for boys' and girls' clubs feature Walt Disney cartoons about fire safety. Presentations to junior or senior high school students include slides that depict situations the students may encounter when babysitting young children. Other programs pay special attention to fire safety in offices or high-rise dwellings. To illustrate fire safety in typical home situations, slides are geared to the composition of the audience—the elderly, for example. Sherman points out that almost any slide of a fire hazard, such as placing a candle in an inappropriate container, can be shot several

times with different individuals as models. People in the audience, he notes, can better identify with the presentation if the individuals pictured in the slides are somewhat like themselves. Sherman himself has shot most of the slides in the department's inventory.

Most of the presentations to businesses and special groups of citizens are offered on an "as requested" basis. And Sherman's staff of two civilian fire prevention specialists have all the requests they can handle. These specially trained women, Penelope Canada and Linda Schulz, are also responsible for the Department's Code Red program. They conduct approximately four presentations apiece each week for groups of 15 to 100 individuals.

Two examples—students and the elderly

Two presentations given on one day—December 3, 1979—show how the fire prevention specialists communicate with different groups. Penelope Canada visited a senior English class at Ingraham High School. Linda Schulz gave a presentation to elderly residents of a high-rise apartment building.

"We frequently visit home economics classes in high schools, but rarely are we invited to an English class," says Canada on the way to the school. "In this instance, a student's research paper on fires in the United States generated interest in fire safety."

When Canada arrives at the school, the teacher informs her that most of the students in the class will be graduating in January. Many will be getting married. Canada gears her presentation accordingly.

She discusses the slides of common fire hazards in terms of what the students will find when they move into their own apartment or house. She compares the cost of installing a smoke detector to the price of other items teenagers typically might buy, such as records or a stereo. She thus explains costs and benefits in terms her audience can understand.

The students are attentive; the teacher is impressed. She asks Canada to stay on for her next class.

On that same day, Linda Schulz visits a high-rise dwelling for the elderly. The meeting is held in a "social events" room complete with coffee, tea, and homemade cookies. About 40 residents attend. Following a brief introduction, Schulz shows slides of common fire hazards.

Many of the slides picture elderly people in their homes. Schulz, like Canada, gears her verbal presentation to her audience. "Don't forget what's on the stove when your phone rings," she reminds them as she shows a slide of a woman talking on the phone while a pot burns.

Schulz includes a special segment on what to do in the event of a fire in a high-rise building. She asks the residents questions about their building and their experiences. They ask her questions, too. And many stay around to ask privately the questions they were too shy to ask in public. Because Schulz has geared her presentation to the needs of her audience, they have confidence in her expertise.

The effectiveness of these fire education presentations results in part from Schulz and Canada's technical expertise and training. But to slant the message to meet the needs of differing audiences requires sensitivity and flexibility as well.

A program for Southeast Asians

Flexibility is a special requirement when the audience consists of recent immigrants from Southeast Asia who do not speak English.

According to Jim Sherman, some 6,000 Vietnamese, Laotians, and Cambodians resided in Seattle as of the end of 1979, and 400 more are arriving each month. "Typically, these individuals speak no English. Many of them lived previously in the woods or near the water," he says. "They are totally unused to modern conveniences such as gas stoves. And they generally dislike uniforms. All these factors create a special challenge for both fire prevention training and fire protection."

Sherman and his staff have designed a basic fire prevention program for these immigrants. The program was developed in response to a need identified by a local firefighter. A letter from Chief Frank Hanson to the International Rescue Committee in October 1979 describes the situation brought to his attention by an officer from Fire Station 6:

> On October 17, his company responded to an apartment house when the manager smelled gas and

Penelope Canada conducts a fire safety program for Southeast Asians.

was unable to locate the source. The firefighters immediately began a door-to-door check and finally located the source of the problem.

When they knocked on the door, there was no response so the manager unlocked the door. The occupants, a Laotian family including two small children, apparently were afraid to open the door.

The firefighters found the oven gas valve on and the pilot light not burning. The apartment was heavily charged with gas of sufficient concentration that an explosion would possibly have occurred if a spark or open flame was produced.

Obviously, this is a tremendously dangerous situation and one that requires immediate attention. It is simply inconceivable to me that these unfortunate people are projected into a completely foreign environment without proper instruction in the use of such potentially lethal appliances.

As a consequence of this incident, Chief Hanson began to work with Jim Sherman and the International Rescue Committee to set up and implement a fire safety training and indoctrination program. The IRC conducts an orientation session which every Asian refugee entering the country must attend in order to obtain clothing and financial assistance. In Seattle, a fire safety presentation is now included as part of the orientation. The program is given to four different language groups through interpreters.

The presentation is very straightforward. Sherman and Mark Reeves, the graphic artist on his staff, have developed a series of "yes" and "no" slides that show safe and unsafe ways of operating a household. For example, one "no" slide shows meat in an oven without a pan; the "yes" slide shows the meat in a pan. They have included slides about grease fires, operation of household appliances, and use of ashtrays, to cite only a few examples. Slides are also used to show what a fire truck looks like and what firefighters do.

Information also is included about how to use the 911 emergency number for individuals who speak English. Those who do not speak English are instructed to go to a neighbor's house to report a fire. In addition, the Fire Department has informed telephone operators in the Seattle area of the problem. They now are better prepared to trace calls from non-English speakers.

The City Light and Gas Company helped us with the slides," Sherman notes. "And we're

happy to supply them to other fire departments for the cost of reproduction, which runs about 20 cents per slide."

For more information about the slides and a "take home" poster contact Inspector Jim Sherman, Public Education, Seattle Fire Department, 301 Second Avenue South, Seattle, Washington 98104, (206) 625-4071.

ORIGINAL CARTOON-FILMS TEACH FIRE SAFETY TO CHILDREN

The Seattle Fire Department, like many others, presents fire prevention programs in elementary schools. But Seattle's program includes a unique element: original cartoon films created especially for children by the Department's Public Education Office. (The films, by the way, are available at cost to other fire departments.)

Inspector Jim Sherman, head of Public Education, originates ideas for the films and writes the scripts. Mark Reeves, the graphic artist on his staff, does the artwork. The films are then used by Sherman as part of S.A.F.E. (School and Fire Safe Education), a program he runs in Seattle's elementary schools.

Elements of S.A.F.E.

Sherman brings the S.A.F.E. program to Seattle's 37,000 students in 88 public and 33 private elementary schools each year. The 45-minute fire safety program is presented in school assemblies to groups of no more than 200 children. Last year, Sherman gave the program 248 times.

The program begins with a short talk on fire safety. "I cover a variety of topics," explains Sherman, "including home escape, emergency phone numbers, smoke detectors, common household fire hazards, and seasonal fire tips."

Sherman then introduces and shows one of his films. He's produced three of them and plans to do three more. "We're developing a new film each year until we have a total of six," he says. "That way, we can rotate them so no elementary school child has to see any film more than once."

Each of the 15- to 17-minute films features the exploits of a paunchy, blundering, but likeable retired firefighter named Mr. Bumblesbee. In each episode, Mr. Bumblesbee stumbles into a situation that allows him to teach others about fire prevention.

"The kids are always anxious to see what will happen to Mr. Bumblesbee," Sherman says. "They've come to know him and what he stands for. Not only do they see him every year on film, but we give them printed materials featuring Mr. Bumblesbee and his cartoon friends."

Every year each elementary school child receives a folder showing Mr. Bumblesbee in a scene from the current film. The folder has fire-escape hints printed on the inside, fold-up flaps. A fire escape planning sheet also is given to the child to take home. In addition, handouts on fire prevention are sent to school principals for distribution to students several times each year. For example, one handout distributed just before Christmas featured holiday safety tips on one side and facts about smoke detectors on the other side. A "Recreation Fire Safety" sheet was prepared for distribution in the spring.

Another element of the S.A.F.E. program is a fire truck demonstration held at the conclusion of the school assembly. Firefighters from the local engine company explain the use

of the equipment to the children. They also attend the school assembly. Their presence helps reinforce the importance of the fire safety message.

A specific example

On December 4, 1979, Jim Sherman visits Sacajawea Elementary School. All the school's approximately 200 students crowd into the assembly room. The principal introduces Sherman who begins with a fire safety talk. But he doesn't just lecture—he solicits active participation by the kids.

For example, in discussing fires that start at night, Sherman explains that the first thing to do is to drop from the bed to the floor. "But be careful if you're in the top of a bunk bed," he warns. The kids chuckle. He then asks, "What should you do next?"

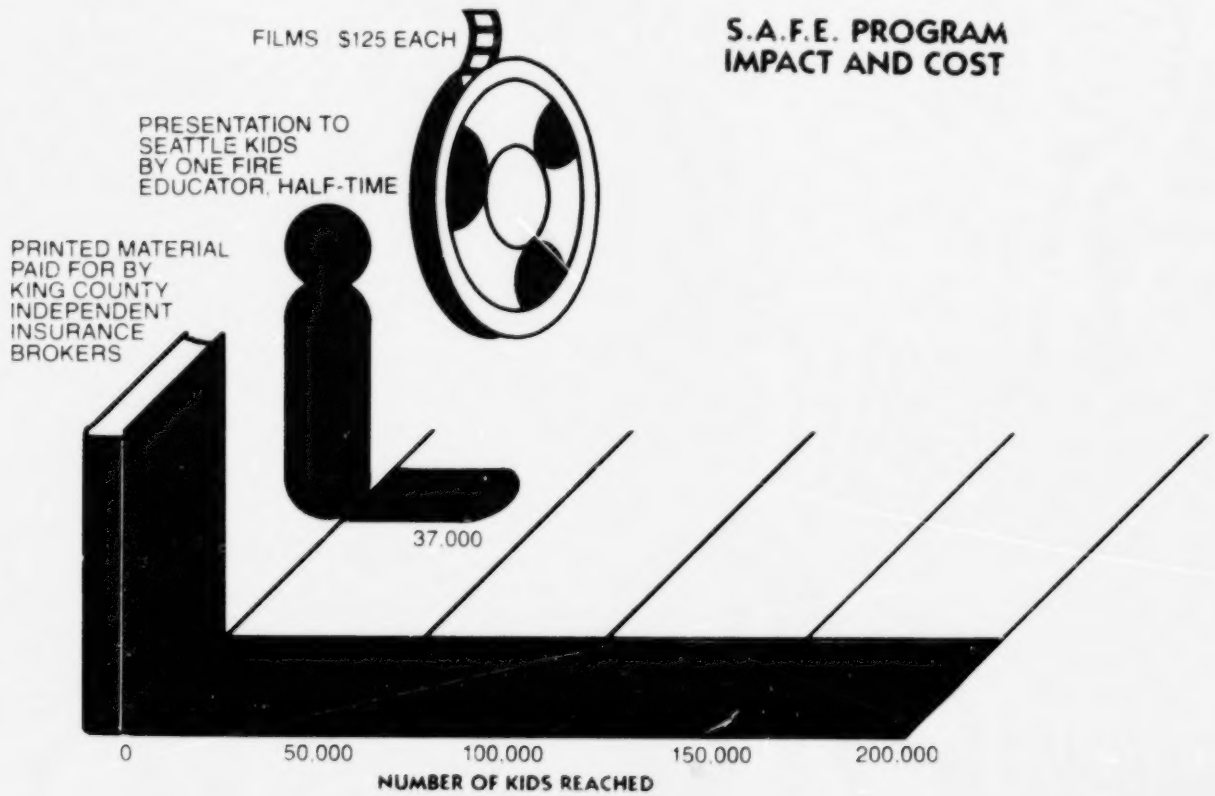
Several children raise their hands. He calls on a girl who answers, "You should roll over on your side 'til you get to the door, and feel it with your hands."

"Right," says Sherman. "And what do you do if the door is hot?"

He calls on another child, elaborates on the child's answer, and presents additional information. His 30 minutes go by quickly and the children stay involved.

When he announces the new film, "Mr. Bumblesbee, Goes to Outer Planet," the children clap. "Oh boy, Mr. Bumblesbee," they begin whispering to one another, recalling last year's episode. The principal reminds them to be quiet.

Following the film, Sherman reinforces its message. The children all get folders showing Mr. Bumblesbee being pulled down into Planet Fumes, a place riddled with fires. They also receive a cardboard copy of a "secret decoder" used by Mr. Bumblesbee to teach fire safety to



the Fumies. And the kids continue to talk about the film as they file out to the playground to see the fire truck demonstration.

History, organization, and funding

Sherman tells about his job and how he's come to be a film producer.

"Until three years ago, we produced a slide show for use in our S.A.F.E. program. But I was bored with it and so were the kids. So with help from a lot of people, I started putting films together."

Here's how the process works: Each summer Sherman picks a topic for the next year's movie and writes a script. Artist Mark Reeves then composes a "story board" made up of drawings suitable for animation. Volunteers from a local radio station provide voices for the cartoon characters. And this year, the composer of the score for the movie "Star Wars" provided the music for the film. The film editor and animator are college students.

Enough copies of the film are produced for distribution to fire departments throughout Washington's King County. The price, which is based on production costs alone, is about $125. In addition to King County fire departments other departments as close as Tacoma and as far away as Texas and Ireland have purchased the films.

The King County Independent Insurance Agents and Brokers Association picks up the tab for the printed materials used in the S.A.F.E. Program. Last year the cost was about $18,000 for the six items distributed to King County's 200,000 children.

The cost of the program to the Seattle Fire Department, therefore, is primarily staff time. Sherman spends about six months each year delivering the S.A.F.E. program to schools and another two to three months planning, writing the script for the new film, and overseeing production. Mark Reeves devotes about half of his time to producing artwork for the films and handouts. Other costs include transportation to and from the schools and the purchase price of the films used in Seattle.

Impact of the program

Tracing the effects of S.A.F.E. on children's attitudes and behaviors is nearly

Jim Sherman heads Public Education and runs the S.A.F.E. program.

impossible. Judgments about the program's impact, consequently, must be inferred from its content and from the community and children's reactions to it. And indications are positive: kids like the program and pay attention; the School Board has given S.A.F.E. its stamp of approval; and the Fire Department has no trouble scheduling an assembly in every school in the city each year.

But more compelling evidence that S.A.F.E. makes a difference comes from those children and their families who have experienced fires. For instance, in the fall of 1979 a ten-year-old boy was babysitting his younger brother and sister when he spotted flames coming from the living room. He evacuated the three of them safely and called the Fire Department from a neighbor's home. He said he knew what to do because of Inspector Sherman's program. Many similar incidents have occurred in Seattle. In fact, each year the Department makes at least one public award to a child who acted promptly, and often courageously, to save lives.

Availability of S.A.F.E. materials

Jim Sherman and his staff have spent thousands of hours creating the S.A.F.E. films

and printed materials. And they are willing to share the results of their efforts with other fire personnel. The films can be purchased for approximately $125 apiece. In addition, Sherman will loan them free-of-charge to any fire department that wishes to preview them. He will provide samples of the printed materials as well. They can be ordered in quantity from the printer at the cost of production; the exact price per copy depends on the size of the order.

For more information write or call Inspector Jim Sherman, Public Education, Seattle Fire Department, 301 Second Avenue South, Seattle, Washington 98104; (206) 625-4071.

PUBLIC AWARENESS EFFORTS HELP CURTAIL ARSON IN SEATTLE

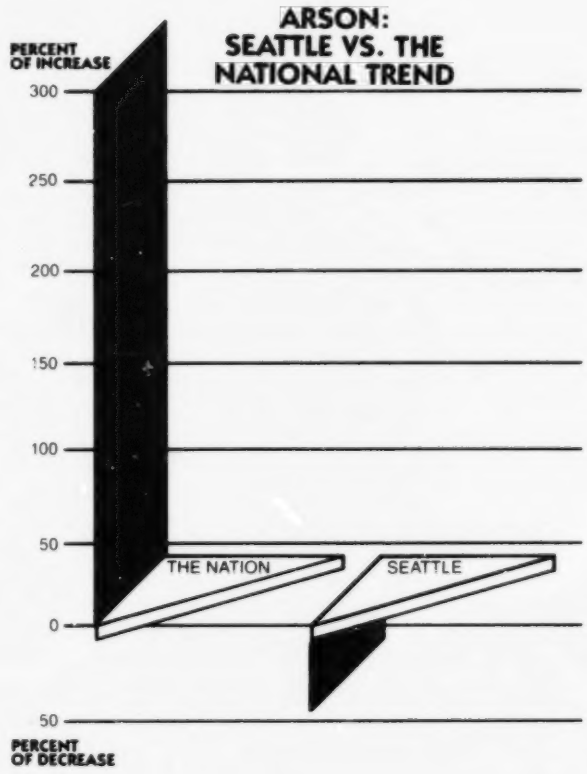
Arson losses soared by about 300 percent in the United States from 1975 to 1979. During this same period, Seattle bucked the trend and cut its arson losses by 44 percent. How? A planned, systematic attack on the problem that includes public awareness as a major element.

Top-level commitment

The Seattle Fire Department began its anti-arson campaign in 1975 under the direction of Chief Frank Hanson. Seattle's arson losses had increased four-fold to more than $3.2 million in 1974. In response, Hanson called for an all-out offensive involving the city's business and civic leaders. With support from Seattle's mayor, Hanson organized a 13-member arson task force that represents eight agencies and organizations: the Chamber of Commerce, the Fire Department, the insurance industry, the Mayor's office, the Police Department, the City Prosecutor's office, the Public Safety Commission, and the Sheriff's office.

"This task force was the beginning of a concerted effort to reduce our arson losses," says Jack Hickam, senior investigator on the Fire Department's arson squad. "It issued a thick report calling for a host of counteractive measures. And because we had support and direction from the top, the recommendations soon were implemented."

Some of the task force's proposals were concerned with the investigation of fires and prosecution of arsonists. Others were aimed at prevention through public awareness. "Of course, the prosecution and conviction of arsonists does serve as a deterrent," Hickam points out. "When potential arsonists know they're likely to be prosecuted and convicted, they're less inclined to commit the crime."



The task force plan thus called for upgrading arson investigation. The number of investigators was increased from 10 to 12, a special 300-hour training course was provided, and investigators received powers of arrest. As a consequence, Seattle's arson arrests and convictions have jumped about 130 percent since 1974. The cases have been publicized through the local media and the Department believes the crackdown has served as an effective deterrent.

The other side of prevention is public education and awareness. And Seattle has conducted an active program since the task force report was first made public in 1975. These efforts have included media campaigns; an arson hot-line and reward sponsored by the insurance industry; sports clinics with professional athletes, featuring an anti-arson message; arson-awareness contests for kids; and an increased Fire Department presence in areas with high incidence of arson.

Jack Hickam is responsible both for arson investigations and arson prevention/public education. He described the Department's public awareness and prevention activities in a recent interview.

Media Campaigns

The Fire Department has conducted several media campaigns designed to raise public consciousness about arson. "Many of these efforts were carried out by our public affairs officer under the direction of Chief Hanson," reports Hickam. "Initially, the task force report itself was the focus of media attention. After that, we conducted a three-month public awareness campaign throughout the state. Local television stations ran public interest announcements and 187 billboards carried anti-arson messages. The goal was to inform the public about the nature and extent of arson. We wanted people to know that we were serious about stopping arson and needed to enlist their help in this effort."

In 1976, an Arson Awareness Week, formally declared by the governor, created another opportunity for public education. A series of newspaper articles investigated the many facets of arson, such as juvenile arson and arson-for-profit. And a Seattle television station produced a documentary on arson. The program won an Emmy Award and was later broadcast on stations across the country.

Insurance industry cooperation

In 1976, Chief Frank Hanson persuaded the Washington Insurance Council (WIC) to establish a toll-free arson hot-line and an arson reward fund. Public concern about arson was a prerequisite for the success of both of these anti-arson strategies. At the same time, publicity surrounding the creation and operation of the hot-line and reward fund served to further increase public awareness.

The arson hot-line is simply a toll-free telephone number (1-800-55ARSON) that individuals throughout the state can use to provide information to authorities regarding arson fires. More than 150 tips were called in during a three-year period.

"When we get a call on the hot-line, we record the basic information and pass it on to the law enforcement agency with jurisdiction in the case," explains Jack Hickam. "We then destroy the information to avoid the legal problems connected with collecting unsubstantiated information on individuals.

The hot-line is used to report information about potential as well as actual arsons. That is, fire and law enforcement personnel sometimes can take preventive action on the basis of a tip received through the hot-line.

The arson reward fund, on the other hand, is designed to provide assistance solely on the investigative end.

"In order for an individual to receive an arson award, he or she must have provided information that led to the trial and conviction of an arsonist," explains Hickam. "In addition, the person must be nominated for the award by a fire chief, police chief, sheriff, prosecuting attorney, or state fire marshal."

The rewards are presented annually out of a fund donated and administered by WIC. When the reward was first initiated in 1975 the amount in the fund was $5,000; it is now $7,500. The reward is split among recipients as judged appropriate by WIC.

Citizens find out about the reward through newspaper articles, television and radio spots, posters and other advertisements. Generally, the reward is offered in connection with a specific arson fire. Often, a notice announcing the reward is posted at the fire site.

Jack Hickam explains downturn in arson.

To date, 28 citizens have received awards totalling $22,000.

Programs for juveniles

Since half of the arson fires in Seattle are set by juveniles, the Fire Department has initiated several programs to reduce arson by youngsters. Many of the activities are targeted for the high-crime areas of the city.

1976 marked the start of a campaign to reduce school fires. The previous year, 144 school fires were recorded, 95 percent set by juveniles. By 1978 the number of fires had dropped 40 percent. What accounts for this improvement? Working closely with school authorities, the Fire Department had statistics complied on all school fires. Pressure was then applied to school principals to act on the problem. Sharples Junior High, for example, recorded numerous instances of vandalism and fires. The school's administration responded by meeting with parents to make them aware of the problem and announcing tougher penalties for students caught setting fires. The following year, only two fires occurred at the school.

A continuing effort to prevent arson by juveniles enlists the cooperation of professional athletes. "We've persuaded players from Seattle's pro soccer and football teams to offer sports clinics for kids," Hickam says. "The clinics are advertised through posters and announcements in schools. The kids sign up for them by stopping by their local fire station."

The sessions are held at soccer or football fields, or in the city's recreation centers. The athletes talk to the youngsters about pro ball and then add a pitch about arson. They emphasize that arson isn't a game, it's a crime. They tie-in the anti-arson message to their own values and career goals. The clinics, targeted to high-crime areas, are popular among youngsters. They have also proven to be effective in reducing juvenile arson in these areas.

Sponsoring contests for kids is another way the Seattle Fire Department raises a youngster's awareness of arson as a crime. Several years ago the Department conducted a "Name the Arson Rat" contest throughout the city. Kids filled out entry forms displayed in supermarkets. The winning entry was "Cinder Cid." According to Hickam, the contest raised awareness among parents as well as kids. "For a time, we used the arson rat as an anti-arson symbol," relates Hickam. "One of my own kids even painted Cinder Cid on his dragster. Thousands of people at the drag races were reminded of the importance of reducing arson."

Another contest is currently being planned for youngsters, ages 9-13. This event will be conducted on an area-by-area basis throughout the city, with particular emphasis on high crime districts. To enter the contest, youngsters will pick up a form at their local fire station. The form is a list of questions, such as: What is arson? Who is responsible for arson investigation and prevention? What number do you call if you have information regarding arson? Other questions focus on general fire safety, such as proper storage of flammable liquids.

The kids will take the form home, answer the questions, and return it to the fire station. At the station, they'll be able to compare their answers with answers prepared by the Fire Department. Thus, they'll get immediate feedback when their interest is high.

The youngsters with the best answers will win prizes. Plans call for the top five winners from throughout the city to be recognized publicly at a professional baseball game.

The contest will be publicized on an area-

by-area basis with posters and school announcements.

An increased Fire Department presence

To reduce both juvenile and adult arson fires, the Seattle Fire Department has increased its visibility. "We're out on the streets so everyone can see us," says Hickam. "This strategy not only deters arsonists but serves to increase public awareness as well."

Arson patrols cruise Seattle's streets from 10 p.m. to 3:30 a.m., the prime time for arson in the city. "The patrols are generally initiated in response to a particular problem such as a warehouse strike," Hickam explains. "In other words, they are intended to increase public awareness and prevent arson from occurring."

Fire companies throughout the city detail personnel to the patrols. They go out in marked cars so they will be noticed. No special training is required for the job; thus the additional cost to the city is minimal.

A related strategy is the distribution of "Community Assistance Bulletins." When a series of fires occur in an area, the arson team writes a description of what's happening. On-duty firefighters then deliver these bulletins which also ask for community assistance in stopping the fires. In two days the firefighters can deliver 10,000 bulletins, enough to flood any given area.

"The patrols and Community Assistance Bulletins are often used in concert," says Hickam. "And they've proven to be effective mechanisms for increasing public awareness and stopping arson. After we go into an area with patrols and bulletins, the fires stop."

The arson squad even attempts to increase public awareness while doing its investigative work: a new arson van that transports investigative equipment is brightly painted and carries a "fight arson" message. "We want crooks to see that the arson squad is around," says Hickam. "And we want the community to know that we're continuing to take the problem seriously."

In Seattle, the public can't doubt their Fire Department's dedication to stopping arson. In addition to the strategies already described, the Department has created a series of highly visible slogans and symbols. "Extinguish Arson" bumper stickers with the arson hot-line number have been distributed throughout the state. "Arrest Arson" posters are in circulation. And the Department is promoting a new anti-arson symbol. Stickers with the symbol are now being printed and will be put on correspondence going out of the Department. Also, Hickam and his staff are working with a grocery bag manufacturer in an attempt to have the symbol printed on bags. The manufacturer produces 80 percent of the grocery bags in Washington State. In fact, the Seattle Fire Department hopes the symbol will catch on nationwide.

A comprehensive strategy

There's no question about the effectiveness of the Seattle Fire Department's anti-arson strategy: the 44 percent drop in arson losses speaks for itself. But which elements of the program have had the greatest impact? The Department has no way of knowing.

"All we know," says Hickam, "is that without a concerted effort to stop it, arson will continue to increase. And we know that together our efforts have resulted in a substantial downturn in arson in our city."

Seattle's comprehensive strategy includes two major thrusts: increasing public awareness

and cooperation; and improving the Fire Department's investigative capability. Both play an essential role and both are a challenge, according to Hickam.

"We've talked today primarily about our public education activities. But educating ourselves has been equally, if not more, important," he claims. "We've had to learn how to take on a police function in order to better investigate arsons and assure that arsonists are arrested and prosecuted. This role is a new one for fire personnel who are accustomed to being service-oriented.

"The goal of fighting fires is to reduce loss to the victim. The goal of arson investigation, on the other hand, is to bring criminals to justice. These two goals require not only different skills, but different emotional responses as well. This distinction needs to be recognized when training firefighters to be arson investigators. In fact, effecting such a change of attitude and orientation has been the most difficult part of our job. But it's been necessary in order to increase our arrest and conviction rate."

Hickam pauses a minute, then concludes his discussion.

"I guess the service side of our job is why we place so much emphasis on public awareness and involvement. We've found that education is an effective tool for curtailing arson. And frankly, we'd rather stop arson before it happens so we can concentrate on our traditional role—service to the community through fighting fires."

For more information about Seattle's anti-arson efforts, including samples of the anti-arson symbol, contact Jack Hickam, senior investigator, Seattle Fire Department, 301 Second Avenue South, Seattle, Washington; (206) 625-4080.

Bumper sticker carries anti-arson message and publicizes hot-line.